

DEQ Kids: Waste and Recycling in Idaho



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Waste is made up of things we no longer want or use. Most waste can either be thrown away or reused. Some waste is dangerous and must be handled with special care. Two major types of waste are **solid** and **hazardous**.

Solid waste

Solid waste includes materials that are created by industrial, commercial, agricultural, and community activities and thrown away. Solid waste can be solid, liquid, or gaseous. Most common solid wastes are paper products, food, plastics, yard debris, glass, and metals. Solid waste does not include anything that is hazardous.

Hazardous waste

Hazardous waste is waste that because of its chemical nature can cause harm to living things, including people, or can damage the land, air and water. Examples of hazardous waste are paint thinner and many household cleaners.

Garbage, garbage everywhere

Everyone creates waste. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that most people create more than 4 pounds of waste each day. A family of 4 creates nearly 123 pounds of garbage a week.

If you live in a city, you have probably seen a garbage truck, and maybe a recycling truck, drive by your home and pick up your solid waste. Just because you don't see your waste after you throw it in the trash can or recycling bin doesn't mean it disappears! Most solid waste is disposed of in one of two ways: either in a landfill or a recycling center. Hazardous waste must be disposed of a special hazardous waste collection facility.

What is a landfill?

A landfill is a central area where garbage trucks dump their loads of solid waste. At the end of each day, the garbage is covered up with dirt to slow down the decomposition process and keep as much liquid as possible from seeping into the water below ground. Day by day, the landfill gets fuller and fuller as more garbage is brought in. Eventually, the landfill fills up and becomes a permanent part of our landscape, and it becomes necessary to build another landfill to take in our garbage.

What is a recycling center?

A recycling center is a place where waste that can be reused is sorted and sent on to factories to be remanufactured into new products.

How can we reduce the amount of garbage we produce?

You can help protect Idaho's environment, save natural resources and energy, extend the life of our landfills, and reduce pollution risks by following these easy practices:

Reduce the amount of waste you create. Start by looking for and buying products with less packaging. Packaging may be pretty, but it is very wasteful in most cases. Use both sides of a sheet of paper before recycling it. Use scrap paper for art projects.

Reuse what you can. Pack your lunch in reusable or recyclable containers to reduce the need for foil or plastic wrap. Don't throw away usable school supplies, clothing or household items. Trade them with your friends, hold a yard sale, or donate the items to charitable organizations. Reuse paper bags, wrapping paper, or newsprint for book covers.

Recycle as many items as possible. Did you know that most of the garbage you throw in the trash is recyclable? Examples of waste that can be recycled are aluminum cans, steel "tin" cans, newspapers, magazines, glass bottles and jars, plastic jugs, junk mail and other paper products, and cardboard boxes.

Compost your yard waste and leftover food scraps. Composting is the controlled decomposition of organic matter by microorganisms into a humus-like product. It takes 3 -12 months to produce compost, depending on the process and type of food wastes being composted. Compost makes great fertilizer for flowerbeds and gardens.

Close the loop—buy green products

Buying green means buying products that are made from recycled materials. Check labels for the recycling symbol. In most cases, these products cost the same or less and are just as durable as raw products. Some examples of green products are paper of all kinds, pencils, and even some park benches. When you buy products made from recycled materials, you help conserve resources and eliminate waste from landfills.

For more information...

Visit the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Web site at www.epa.gov/kids/garbage.htm for more information on solid waste and the environment.